The Brethren's Evangelist.

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VOL. VI. ASHLAND, O., WEDNESDAY, APRIL 23, 1884. NO. 17.

SENSITIVENESS OF CHRIST.

SERMON BY T. DE WITT TALMAGE.

"Who touched me?"—Mark 5 : 31.

A great crowd of excited people elbowing each other this way and that, and Christ in the midst of the commotion. They were on the way to see Him restore to complete health a dying person. Some thought He could effect the cure, others that He could not. At any rate, it would be an interesting experiment. A very sick woman of twelve years' invalidism is in the crowd. Some say her name was Martha, others say it was Veronica. I do not know what her name was; but this is certain; she had tried all styles of cure. Every shelf of her humble home had medicines on it. She had employed many of the doctors of that time when medical science was more rude and rough and ignorant than we can imagine in this time, when the word physician or surgeon stands for potent and educated skill. Professor Lightfoot gives a list of what he supposes may have been the remedies she had applied. I suppose she had been blistered from head to foot, and had tried the compress, and had used all styles of astringent herbs, and she had been mauled and hacked and cut and lacerated until life to her was a plague. Beside that, the Bible indicates her doctors' bills had run up frightfully, and she had paid money for medicines and for surgical attendance and for hygenic apparatus until her purse was as exhausted as her body.

What, poor woman, are you doing in that jostling crowd? Better go home and to bed and nurse your disorders. No! Wan and wasted and faint she stands there, her face distorted with suffering, and ever and anon biting her lip with some acute pain, and sobbing until her tears fall from the hollow eye upon the faded dress; only able to stand because the crowd is so close to her pushing her this way and that. Stand back! Why do you crowd that poor body? Have you no consideration for a dying woman? But just at that time the crowd parts and this invalid comes almost up to Christ; but she is behind Him and His human eye does not take her in. She has heard so much about His kindness to the sick, and she does feel so wretched, she thinks if she can only just touch Him once it will do her good. She will not touch Him on the sacred head, for that might be irreverent. She will not touch Him on the hand for that might seem too familiar. She says: "I will, I think, touch Him on His coat, not on the top of it, or on the bottom of the main fabric, but on the border, the blue border, the long threads of the fringe of that blue border; there can be no harm in that. I don't think he will hurt me, I have heard so much about Him. Beside that, I can stand this no longer. Twelve years of suffering have worn me out. This is my last hope." And she presses through the crowd still further and reaches for Christ, but cannot quite touch Him. She pushes still further through the crowd and kneels and puts her finger to the edge of the blue fringe of the border. She just touches it. Quick as an electric shock there thrilled back into her shattered nerves and shrunken veins and exhausted arteries and panting lungs and withered muscles, health, beautiful health, rubicund health. God-given and complete health. The twelve years' march of pain and pang and suffering over suspension-bridge of nerve and through tunnel of bone instantly halted.

Christ recognizes somehow that magnetic and healthful influence through the medium of the blue fringe of His garment had shot out. He turns and looks upon that excited crowd, and startles them with the interrogatory of my text: "Who touched me?" The insolent crowd in substance replied: "How do we know? You get in a crowd like this and you must expect to be jostled. You ask us a question you know we cannot answer." But the roseate and rejuvenated woman came up and knelt in front of Christ, and told of the touch, and told of the restoration and Jesus said: "Daughter thy faith hath made thee whole. Go in peace." So Mark gives us a dramitization of the Gospel. Oh, what a doctor Christ is! In every one of our households may He be the family physician.

Notice that there is no addition of help to others without subtraction of power from ourselves. The context says that as soon as this woman was healed, Jesus felt that virtue or strength had gone out of Him. No addition of help to others without subtraction of strength from ourselves. Did you never get tired for others? Have you never risked your health for others? Have you never preached a sermon, or delivered an exhortation, or offered a burning prayer, and then felt afterward that strength had gone out of you? Then you have never imitated Christ.

Are you curious to know how that garment of Christ should have wrought such a cure for this suppliant invalid? I suppose that Christ was surcharged with vitality. You know that disease may be conveyed from city to city by garments as in case of epidemic, and so I suppose that garments may be surcharged with health. I suppose that Christ had such physical magnetism that it permeated all His robe down to the last thread on the border of the blue fringe. But in addition to that there was a divine thrill, there was a miraculous potency, there was an omnipotent therapeutics without which this twelve years' invalid would not have been instantly restored.

Now, if omnipotence cannot help others without depletion, how can we ever expect to bless the world without self-sacrifice? A man who gives to some Christain object until he feels it, a man in his occupation or profession over-works that he may educate his children, a man who on Sunday night goes home, all his nervous energy wrung out by active service in church, or Sabbath-school, or city evangelization, has imitated Christ, and the strength has gone out of him. A mother who robs herself of sleep in behalf of a sick-cradle, a wife who bears up cheerfully under domestic misfortune that she may encourage her husband in the combat against disaster, a woman who by hard saving and earnest prayer and good counsel, wisely given, and many years devoted to the rearing her family for God and usefulness and heaven, and who has nothing to show for it but premature gray hairs and a profusion of deep wrinkles, is like Christ, and strength has gone out of her. That strength or virtue may have gone out through a garment she has made for the home, that strength may have gone out through the sock you knit for the barefoot destitute, that strength may go out through the mantle hung up in some closet after you are dead. So a crippled child sat every morning on her father's front step so that when the kind Christian teacher passed by to school she might take hold of her dress and let the dress slide through her pale fingers. She said it helped her pain so much and made her so happy all the day. Aye, have we not in all our dwellings garments of the departed, a touch of which thrills us through and through? the life of those who are gone thrilling through the life of those who stay. But mark you the principle I evolve from this subject. No addition of health to others unless there be a subtraction of strength from ourselves. He felt that strength had got out of Him.

Notice also in this subject a Christ sensitive to human touch. We talk about God on a vast scale so much we hardly appreciate His accessibility. God in magnitude rather than God in minutia, God in the infinite rather than God in the infinitesimal; but here in my text we have a God arrested by a suffering touch. When in the sham trial of Christ they struck Him on the cheek, we can realize how that cheek tingled with pain. When under the scourging the rod struct the shoulders and back of Christ, we can realize how he must have writhed under the lacerations. But here there is a sick and nerveless finger that just touches the long threads of the blue fringe of His coat, and He looks around and says, "Who touched Me?"

We talk about sensitive people, but Christ was the impersonation of all sensitiveness. The slightest stroke of the smallest finger of human disability makes all the nerves of His head and heart and hand vibrate. It is not a stolid Christ, not a phlegmatic Christ, not a preoccupied Christ, not a hard Christ, not an iron-cased Christ, but an exquisitely sensitive Christ that my text unveils. All the things that touch us touch Him, if by the hand of prayer we make the connecting line between Him and ourselves complete. Mark you, this invalid of the text might have walked through that crowd all day and cried about her suffering, and no relief would have come if she had not touched Him. When in your prayer you lay your hand on Christ you touch all the sympathies of an ardent and glowing and responsive nature.

You know that in telegraphy there two currents of electricity. So when you put out your hand of prayer to Christ there are two currents—a current of sorrow rolling up from your heart to Christ, and a current of commiseration rolling from the heart of Christ to you. Two currents. Oh, why do you go unhelped? Why do you go wondering about this and wondering about that? Why do you not touch Him?

Are you sick? I do not think you are any worse off than this invalid of the text. Have you had a long struggle? I do not think it has been more than twelve years. Is your case hopeless? So was this of which my text is the diagnosis and prognosis. "Oh," you say, "there are so many things between me and God." There was a whole mob between this invalid and Christ. She pressed through and I guess you can press through.

Is your trouble a home trouble? Christ shows Himself especially sympathetic with questions of domesticity, as when at the wedding in Cana He alleviated a housekeeper's predicament, as when tears rushed forth at the broken home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus. Men are sometimes ashamed to weep. There are men who if tears start will conceal them. They think it is unmanly to cry. They do not seem to understand it is manliness and evidence of a great heart. I am afraid of a man who does not know how to cry. The Christ of the text was not ashamed to cry over human misfortune. Look at that deep lake of tears opened by the two words of the evangelist; "Jesus wept!" Behold Christ on the only day of His earthly triumph marching on Jerusalem, the glittering domes obliterated by the blinding rain of tears in His eyes and on His cheek; for when He beheld the city He wept over it. O man of the many trials, O woman of the heart-break, why do you not touch Him?

"Oh," says some one, "Christ don't care for me. Christ is looking the other way. Christ has the vast affairs of His kingdom to look after. He has the armies of sin to overthrow, and there are so many worse cases of trouble than mine He doesn't care about me, and His face is turned the other way." So His back was turned to this invalid of the text. He was on His way to effect a cure which was famous and popular and wide-resounding. But the context says, "He turned Him about." If He was facing to the north He turned to the south; if He was facing to the east He turned to the west. What turned Him about? The Bible says He has no shadow of turning. He rides on in His chariot through the eternities. He marches on crushing sceptres as though they were the crackling alders of a brook's bank, and tossing thrones on either side of Him without stopping to look which way they fall. From everlasting to everlasting. "He turned Him about." He whom all the allied armies of hell cannot stop a minute or divert an inch, by the wan, sick, nerveless finger of human suffering turned clear about.

Oh, what comfort there is in this subject for people who are called nervous. Of course, it is a misapplied word in that case, but I use it in the ordinary parlance. After twelve years of suffering, oh, what nervous depression she must had had. You all know that a good deal of medicine taken if it does not cure leaves the system exhausted, and in the Bible in so many words she "had suffered many things of many physicians, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse." She was as nervous as nervous could be. She knew all about insomnia and about the awful apprehension of something going to happen, and irritability about little things that in health would not have perturbed her. I warrant you it was not a straight stroke she gave to the garment of Christ, but a trembling forearm, and an uncertain motion of the hand, and a quivering finger with which she missed the mark toward which she aimed. She did not touch the garment just where she expected to touch it.

When I see this nervous woman coming to the Lord Jesus Christ, I say she is making the way for all nervous people. Nervous people do not get much sympathy. If a man breaks his arm everybody is sorry and they talk about it all up and down the street. If a woman has an eye put out by accident, they say: "That's a fearful thing." Everybody is asking about her convalescence. But when a person is suffering under the ailment of which I am now speaking, they say: "Oh, that's nothing, she's a little nervous, that's all," putting a slight upon the most agonizing of suffering.

Now, I have a new prescription to give you. I do not ask you to discard human medicament. I believe in it. When the slightest thing occurs in the way of sickness in my household, we always run for the doctor. I do not want to despise medicine. If you cannot sleep nights do not despise bromide of potassium. If you have nervous paroxysm do not despise morphine. If you want to strengthen up your system do not despise qunine as a tonic. Use all right and proper medicines. But I want you to bring your insomnia, and bring your irritability, and bring all your weaknesses, and with them touch Christ. Touch Him not only on the hem of His garments, but touch him on the shoulder where He carries our burden, touch Him on head where He remembers all our sorrows, touch him on the heart, the centre of all His sympathies. Oh yes, Paul was right when he said, "We have not a high priest who cannot be touched."

The fact is Christ Himself was nervous. All those nights out of doors in malarial districts where an Englishman or an American dies if he goes at certain seasons. Sleeping out of doors so many nights, as Christ did, and so hungry, and His feet wet with the wash of the sea, and the wilderness trampand the persecution and outrage must have broken down His nervous system; a fact proved by the statement that he lived so short a time on the cross. That is a lingering death ordinarily, and many a sufferer on the cross has writhed in pain twenty-four hours, forty-eight hours. Christ lived only six. Why? He was exhausted before He mounted the bloody tree. Oh, it is a worn-out Christ, sympathetic with all people worn out.

O my brother, I am so glad when we touch Christ with our sorrows He touches us. When out of your grief and vexation you put your hand on Christ, it wakens all human reminiscence. Are we tempted? He was tempted. Are we sick? He was sick. Are we persecuted? He was persecuted. Are we bereft? He was bereft.

St. Yoo, of Kermartin, one morning went out and saw a beggar asleep on his doorstep. The beggar had been all night in the cold. The next night St. Yoo compelled this beggar to come up in the house and sleep in the saint's bed while St. Yoo passed the night on the doorstep in the cold. Somebody asked him why that eccentricity. He replied, "It isn't an eccentricity; I want to know how the poor suffer, I want to know their agonies that I may sympathize with them, and therefore I slept on this cold step last night." That is the way Christ knows so much about our sorrows. He slept on the cold doorstep of an inhospitable world that would not let Him in. He is sympathetic now with all the suffering and all the tried and all the perplexed. Oh, why do you not go and touch Him?

You utter your voice in a mountain pass and there come back ten echoes, twenty echoes, thirty echoes perhaps, weird echoes. Every voice of prayer, every ascription of praise, every groan of distress has divine response and celestial reverberation, and all the galleries of heaven are filled with sympathetic echoes, and throngs of ministering agels echo, and the temples of the redeemed echo, and the hearts of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost echo and re-echo.

Our Influence.

Every spoken word, every outward act, is a help or a hindrance to those with whom we are associated. Every word and action set in motion a wave of influence which flows on into eternity. O that we fully realized this, that, long after we had died and been forgotten, others will be guided in certain directions and led to do certain things, either for goor or evil, because we to-day were patient and kind and honest and conscientious, or cross and dishonest and wicked and faithless. We may live an outwardly reputable life, may at last, by the mercy of God, reach heaven, while others, influenced by our example, may be forever lost. How careful, then, ought we to pray on this, the threshold of another year, that our lives may be so pure and true that others may "take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus," and follow us as we follow Christ. Let us do nothing we would not be willing our dearest friend should imitate.